

MOZART (1756-1791): Overture to *Lucio Silla*

Tonight's concert presents a wonderful opportunity to hear music of the youthful Mozart beside that of the mature Mozart, and to confirm what we always suspected—the only composer to surpass the skill of Mozart was Mozart himself. Mozart's opera career began early with a commission for an oratorio-like piece in 1767. He was all of eleven. Although most of us think mainly of the great operas from the last ten years of his life, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così*, *Magic Flute*, Mozart had a long opera apprenticeship, with a string of works in the 1770's based on classical Roman history and myth. *Lucio Silla* (1772), was one of those, that Mozart (now sixteen) wrote for the Teatro Regio Ducal in Milan and, as with other of his operas from the same period, was burdened with a less than inspiring libretto.

The Italian audience must have loved it, however, as it played 27 sold-out performances in that Carnival season. The overture is a lighthearted piece, one of Mozart's miniature three movement symphonies in the Italian manner (no Viennese minuet), and, as expected, musically unrelated to the opera. A lively opening movement, *Molto allegro*, includes a pair of trumpets and timpani giving a ceremonial-sounding flavour—well-suited to the opening of Milan's Carnival season as well as to the opera itself; then follows a calming *Andante* movement, scored for woodwind and strings alone; the finale, *Molto allegro*, is a lively but brief rondo including trumpets and drums.

BEETHOVEN (1770-1827): Piano Concerto #1 in C major (1795).

If we were to begin by stating that Beethoven's Piano Concerto #1 is **not** his first concerto but his second, and that #2 is really #1, you'd say "Huh?," and then, probably, "Big deal!" But it is important in a way. The more youthful concerto (#2) we would expect to reflect in part the prevailing musical influences of the time, i.e. Mozart and Haydn, and indeed it does. But now in Concerto #1 (the later work) we hear more clearly a musical voice that is distinctly "Beethoven." From the beginning of the first movement, *Allegro con brio*, there is a vigour and self-assurance expressed in the resolute opening theme that pervades much of the rest of the movement. There is still a prevailing balance and grace that speaks of Mozart, yet the sheer energy of the virtuoso piano passages and the expansion of the overall form are evidence of the urgency of Beethoven's emerging creative power.

After the brilliant, extroverted opening movement, the second movement, *Largo*, is inward-looking, gently expressive, with all of the piano's lyrical qualities brought into play. With the wind section reduced and the first clarinet given a prominent role, the orchestra engages in a rich but often subdued dialogue with the solo piano as it repeats and develops the opening thematic material.

Rumours to the contrary, Beethoven did not lack a sense of fun, and it is fully on display in the third movement, *Rondo*, marked *Allegro scherzando*. (The *scherzando* label is a clue.) The movement is dashing and restless, even unpredictable. The sparkling rondo theme, sounding almost a trifle cheeky, is full of potential for development, and Beethoven exploits its possibilities fully in the contrasting sequence of episodes between each repetition of the rondo motif. This "argument" between rondo theme and episode is pursued with great vigour until the piano insists on a cadenza, after which the work quickly ends.

MOZART: Symphony #41 in C major, *Jupiter*

There are two issues that all concert notes for Mozart's last symphony, # 41, seem to need to deal with. One is the symphony's nickname, "Jupiter," that became current in parts of Europe by the early 1820's, and was not, of course, Mozart's invention. Is it just a label (a substitute for #41), or is it intended as a description, one that requires listeners to search for Jove-like qualities (whatever those may be) in the music? The second issue is the extraordinary white heat of creative activity Mozart must have experienced in those few weeks between June and August of 1788, in which time he completed his last three symphonies, #39, #40 and #41, each of them over 30 minutes in length, and each an acknowledged masterpiece.

Symphony #41 is dated August 10, 1788. The orchestra includes trumpets and timpani, just one flute and no clarinets. As for the music, the key of C major traditionally has associations of solemnity, and the decisive opening of the *Allegro vivace* reflects this quality, which recurs throughout the movement, sometimes aided by strongly contrapuntal writing, and contrasted with two subsidiary themes both much gentler in nature. The second movement, *Andante cantabile*, is in F major, with muted strings and without the trumpets and drums. It is one of Mozart's most deeply felt and eloquent slow movements, yet complex and dramatic. The serene opening theme quite quickly becomes, first darkened, and then impassioned in an agitated syncopated section in C minor, eventually emerging into calm again with the introduction of a second theme and then its sequel. Mozart reworks these materials reawakening the agitation, then restoring calm before, in the heart of the movement, plunging into a new turbulent episode. With a concluding restatement of the opening themes, calm is restored at the movement's end.

The Minuet, *Allegretto*, is like an interlude poised between the emotional intensity of the *Andante* and the dynamic potency of the finale. The descending chromatic line of the opening bars can be heard in almost every bar of the minuet, and the development of this phrase culminates in delicate passages of woodwind imitation. The trio is brief, opening with a two chord closing cadence (a sort of musical in-joke), but later contains a clear foreshadowing of the main theme of the last movement, before the minuet theme returns to close the movement.

Mere programme notes are not designed to unravel the compositional marvels of a movement such as the *Molto Allegro* finale to this symphony. Mozart uses the sonata form common in his time, but in a condensed manner that incorporates fugal structures of unparalleled virtuosity. Yet most of his musical ideas are brief tags which he combines and recombines in a variety of ways. Everything leads to a closing coda in which all his themes are integrated in an astounding display of five-part counterpoint that is overwhelming, powerful and thrilling just as pure sound.

With the music over we perhaps more fully understand the "Jupiter" question. If anything, it is not the work itself on which we should affix the "Jupiter" label but on its composer, whose seemingly inexhaustible creative resources are nowhere so authoritatively on display.